

The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks: 100 Years of Wilderness Stewardship

By DAVE GIBSON

On the day after I begin this article for AJES, The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks will officially reach 100 years. February 24, 1902 marks the date when the Association incorporated as an organization of individuals who would "enlist the interest of all true sportsmen and lovers of nature throughout the state and that with the cooperation of all, an association would be created with the likelihood of its becoming a useful body which would yield a lasting and potent influence on Adirondack affairs." On that same morning, the founding leaders of the Association voted to oppose with all their energy any amendment to the fundamental tenets of Article 7 of the New York State Constitution, the "forever wild" clause (renumbered Article 14 in 1938) that requires all the lands of the state "to be forever kept as wild forest lands."

Paul Schaefer, author and defender of Adirondack rivers and wilderness, wrote in 1995 of the planned 2001 Centennial of the Association for the Protection of



Elk Lake, protected by the Park's first conservation easement. Photo by Paul Schaefer, courtesy of the Schaefer Collection, Adirondack Research Library of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks.

the Adirondacks: "The full story of the Association is unique in conservation history. The story begins with the Constitutional Convention of 1894 which approved the covenant mandating the preservation of the state Forest preserve (Article 14)."

Schaefer writes that Gifford Pinchot, soon to be President Theodore Roosevelt's Forestry Czar and one of America's founding foresters, urged repeal of Article 14 in order to permit the "scientific" lumbering of state lands. "A detailed color map by Pinchot of 1901 shows 100,000 acres of Forest Preserve surrounding Raquette

Lake ripe for lumbering with plans for roads, a railroad, sawmill and other developments," Schaefer continued. It never happened, argued Schaefer, thanks in large measure to the subsequent organization of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks.

It took several months before the Association's principal mission, to defend Article 14 and the wilderness character of the Forest Preserve, came into sharper focus. At first, a measure of self-interest was imbedded in the altruistic goals of the Association's founders, all Adirondack landowners. The man presiding over the first meeting of

Dave Gibson is the Executive Director of The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. He can be reached at The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, P.O. Box 951, Schenectady, NY 12301-0951.
www.global2000.net/protectadks

the Association on December 12, 1901, Judge Warren Higley, was a member of the private preserve known as the Adirondack League Club, then 80,000 acres in size. Of interest to Judge Higley, as recorded in the meeting minutes, were "whether lumbering shall be done by the state, how the game can be best preserved and improved, what protection the state shall give to owners of private preserves against the condemnation of their lakes, rivers and trout streams, and legislation about the future interests of our Adirondack forests."

The Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York, Timothy Woodruff, also spoke at the meeting. Soon to become a Trustee and Officer of the Association, he urged more specific action upon the organization: more land acquisition in the Forest Preserve. In 1901, the Adirondack Park was then 3.2 million acres of which New York State owned 1.3 million acres as Forest Preserve, private parks and preserves totaled 800,000 acres, "leaving 1 million acres that should be acquired by the state to insure the forests from destruction by the hardwood lumbermen and wood alcohol operators," said Woodruff. Woodruff was building a personal preserve deep in the Adirondack woods south of Raquette Lake. He had a clear economic interest in the state's acquisition of more state land surrounding his own holdings.

The coincidence of altruism and concern for the environment with personal and club interests could have led merely to the formation of an association of club or preserve

owners. It did not. The organizing committee recommended that an association of individuals rather than of clubs would be the better decision. With its clarion call to defend the Constitution's forever wild mandate, referring to that article its "Magna Carta," The Association had found its calling.

Article 14 certainly needed defending by those outside the seats of government. There is no need to recite Adirondack history here, but suffice it to say that from the moment of its birth, "forever wild" lands in the Adirondacks were considered by majorities in the State Legislature and, all too often, by the executive branch and its conservation agencies in Albany, as "annually up for grabs." Commercial lumbering, water power, manufacturing and real estate interests made life for the Association and its allies very interesting. For more on this subject, turn to Frank Graham's *The Adirondack Park: A Political History*, or Norm Van Valkenburgh's *Forest Preserve Chronology* or his short pamphlet, *The Forest Preserve of New York State: A Short History*, available from the Association's Adirondack Research Library.

As Graham puts it, "the Association has struggled persistently and often tenaciously to live up to its name." Perhaps graduate students sorting through these 100 years of citizen activism for the Forest Preserve will reach a similar conclusion. Without in any way denigrating or discounting the commitment, dedication and hard work of many Governors, Commissioners and state-employed natural resource

professionals down through the years, I believe that without the Association's activity and that of other non-governmental organizations throughout these many years, the State of New York would not have a Forest Preserve worthy of the name at the turn of the 21st century.

The story of the Association's history, influence on events and development can perhaps best be told through a brief description of its leaders. These leaders shared at least two qualities in common. Each felt and still feels an abiding and resilient concern and responsibility for the Constitution's "forever wild" philosophy. Also, all freely share the credit and the responsibility for advocating a firm defense of the Forest Preserve. They knew then, and know more than ever today, that close consultation and cooperation with other organizations, private and public, largely determines the considerable success in retaining the potency of Article 14 and related protective statutes.

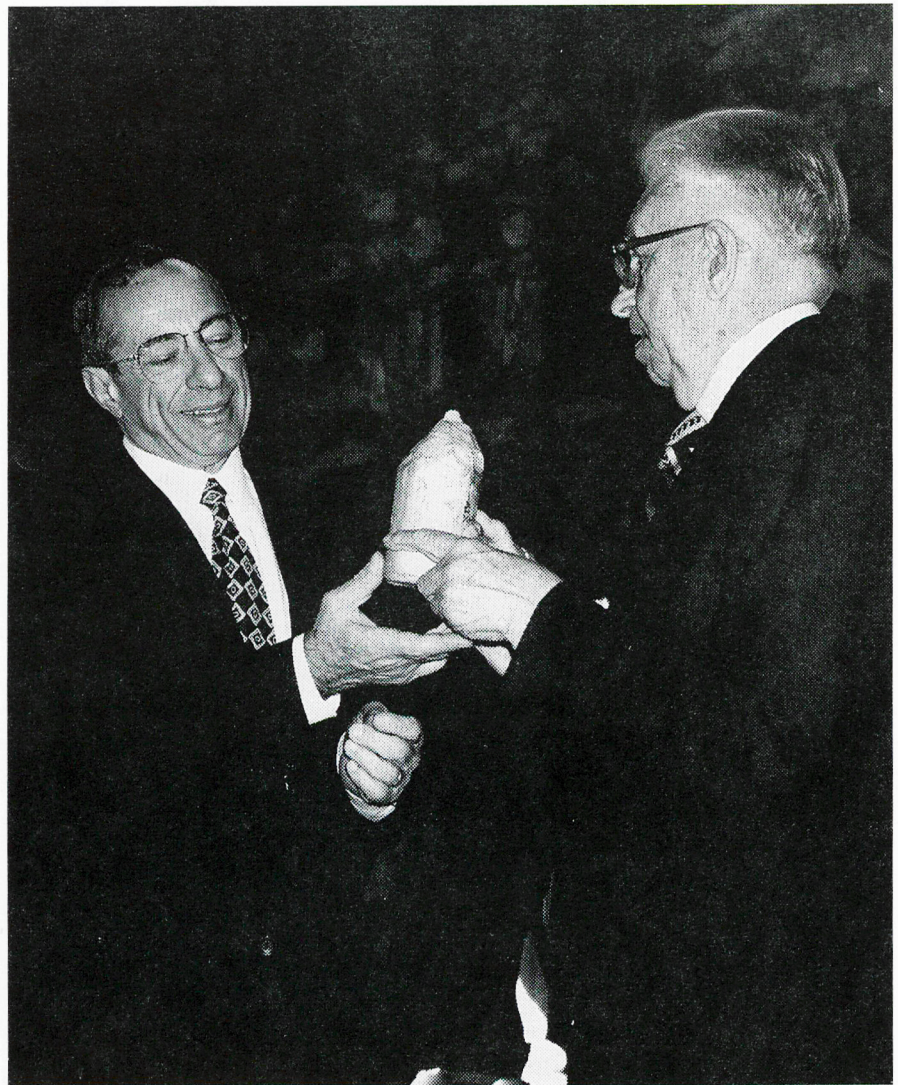
The cast included the Association's first hired hand, Executive Secretary Edward H. Hall, who served faithfully from 1902 until 1929. Hall spent weeks at a time in the Adirondacks under all conditions investigating timber thievery and malfeasance by state officials with respect to the Forest Preserve and the timber thereon. His detailed reports and photographs were feared or respected, depending on the position of the reader.

Our early leaders also included John Agar, a venerable President whose beliefs, along with many of

his contemporaries, were ambiguous when it came to a firm defense of the "forever wild" clause and wilderness preservation. He urged a repeal of the Constitution's prohibition on cutting trees on the Forest Preserve in 1915, thinking that "scientific forestry" had advanced sufficiently to permit it. However, Louis Marshall, the constitutional scholar, civil rights attorney and Trustee of the Association, eloquently opposed such a loosening of these strictures. Thankfully, Marshall's views ultimately prevailed at the Convention and the critical first two sentences of the "forever wild" clause were not tampered with.

Agar also presided over the Association's support for a famous amendment to the Constitution in 1913 to permit three percent of the Forest Preserve to be flooded for reservoirs for municipal water supply, canals and for regulating the flow of streams. The Association had been and continued to be opposed to dams that flooded lands of the State, but Agar and others on the Board believed deeply in the order and philosophy of their day, that being the efficient utilization of natural resources. I can only presume that to Agar, three percent seemed like a small amount of State land and a small enough crack in the Constitutional armor to pay for upholding this majority sentiment.

On the other hand, Agar also presided over the campaign to acquire Mount Marcy for the public domain. In 1919, Agar and the Association set out to acquire the mountain summit then seriously threatened by commercial lumber-



Paul Schaefer, Association Vice-President, 1957-1994, presents Adirondack "beaver gavel" to then Governor Mario M. Cuomo at Silver Bay, Lake George in

ing. The campaign for "Victory Mountain Park" was conceived as a memorial to all those who had sacrificed in the "war to end all wars," World War I. The mountain was to become part of the Forest Preserve and the money raised would be in small sums of one dollar or more by public subscription. The Victory Mountain Park Committee included leaders of academia, industry and government, with Governor Alfred E. Smith as the Honorary Chairman. Within a year the Com-

mittee's goal was met, thanks in large measure to moneys committed from the 1916 state bond issue for acquisition of Forest Preserve, the first of many such bonds in the decades to follow. Fortunately, the name of the mountain was never changed.

President Agar and his Board of Trustees also brought the 1929 lawsuit, *McDonald v. Association*, that negated legislation to create the Olympic bobsled run on Forest Preserve lands near Lake Placid and

which resulted in the famous 1930 ruling and judicial dicta of Judge Hinman of the Appellate Division, Third Department, that is still relied upon as Constitutional guidance: "We must preserve it (the Forest Preserve) in its wild nature, its trees, its rocks, its streams. . . It was made a wild resort in which nature is given free rein. . . It must always retain the character of a wilderness." Park scholars, activists and administrators continue to scrutinize and debate the McDonald decision and language, for I believe it is still the only precedent-setting judicial interpretation of Article 14 from the State Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.

By its 50th anniversary in 1951-52, the organization was led by Frederick Kelsey, Vice President Karl Frederick and Legal Counsel Marshall McLean. Times had changed and so had the Association's Board. These leaders, with Paul Schaefer's leadership and guidance, won the Association's approval to work with Schaefer's Adirondack Moose River Committee to block the apparently limitless powers of the River Regulating Commissions of that day to dam Adirondack rivers for hydropower. This "wild rivers coalition" of the 1940s and 50s, after many defeats, in 1953 succeeded against all the powers arrayed against them in achieving the truly remarkable amendment to Article 14 that stripped from the Constitution (the aforementioned 1913 "three percent" amendment) the authority of such commissions to flood lands of the state "to regulate the flow of streams."

Once again, we see that a slight change in the wording of a constitutional amendment can have enormous and, in this instance, positive consequences. With this one change, the elimination of authority to flood state lands for river regulating purposes, proposed dams at the following places were effectively eliminated by virtue of the very burdensome requirement to succeed in a constitutional amendment for each one of them: Piseco Lake, Lake Pleasant, Goodnow Flow, Cedar River Flow, Elm Lake, Kunjamuk River, Thirteenth Lake, Boreas Ponds, Upper Hudson River, Cheney Ponds, Schroon River, Indian Lake and the Essex Chain of Lakes. However, as we shall see, this did not prevent dam builders from proposing major impoundments on the Upper Hudson later on.

Association Presidents also included Lithgow Osborne, a former State Conservation Department Commissioner who, while serving as the Commissioner, personally investigated timber thievery from the Forest Preserve near Long Lake. Osborne was President in the early and mid 1950s during the intense and public debate about the future of the Forest Preserve with regard to segmenting off some of the Forest Preserve as wilderness, while permitting cutting of trees for firewood and to promote growth for white-tailed deer reproduction on other state lands. The Association opposed such compromises and also engaged in intense debate with the State Conservation Department over recreational motor vehicles on the Forest Pre-

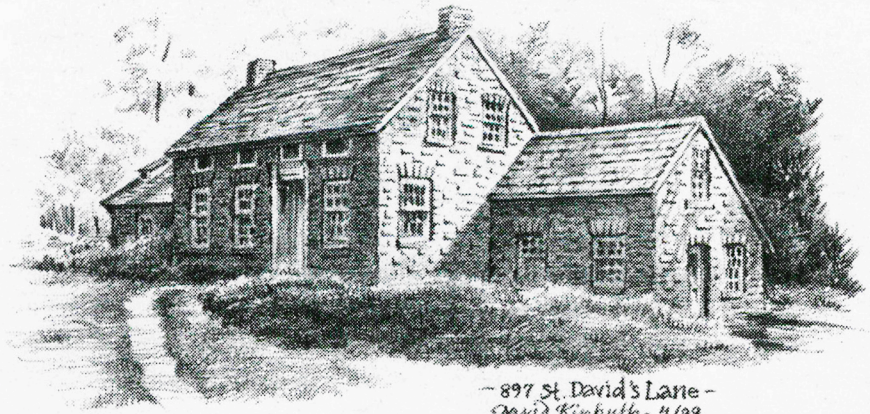
serve, a debate that continues strongly to the present day. Jeeps and all kinds of mechanized buggies were utilizing old fire truck trails throughout the Forest Preserve, a practice the state actually encouraged at the time as a way to "spread out" public recreational uses. Leaders of the Association and the Adirondack Mountain Club lobbied the state to study the creation of Wilderness in the Adirondacks and to restrict motorized uses beginning in 1958. By 1972, the state finally created designated Wilderness Areas where all public motorized use is prohibited. A similar State Land Master Plan and Wilderness/Wild Forest system was later created for the Catskill Forest Preserve.

Of course, the organizer of the Moose River Committee, the coalition that saved the South Branch of the Moose River near Old Forge from power dams at Higley and Panther Mountain, was none other than Paul Schaefer. Schaefer became Association Vice President in 1957 and remained in that role well into the 1990s. At one time, Schaefer was offered the job of Deputy Commissioner in the State Conservation Department. He refused the job, believing his effectiveness as a spokesman for wilderness conditions on the Forest Preserve would be far greater as a citizen conservationist. Entire articles have been devoted to his 65-year career in Adirondack wilderness preservation and his fruitful partnership with the author of the National Wilderness Preservation Act, Howard Zahniser. A full Schaefer biography will

doubtless be undertaken in the coming years.

By 1959, the Association was led by President Richard Pough. Pough was a top curator of ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History and a founder earlier that decade of The Nature Conservancy. Schaefer often told the story of how he and Pough feared for the future of Elk Lake once the Adirondack Northway made access to and development of that lake in North Hudson more likely. Together, they urged the conservation of Elk Lake at a 1959 meeting in New York City at a time when the State had only a few tens of thousands of dollars to pay for such protection. After Conservation Commissioner Sharon Mauhs made his best offer, the lake's owner, Samuel Bloomingdale, huddled with his attorneys. "That offer is not good enough," said Bloomingdale. Pough, Schaefer and Mauhs hung their heads. "You fail to understand me," responded Bloomingdale. "I will take nothing more than a dollar" for the easement that still protects the shoreline and islands of Elk Lake. It may have been the first conservation easement of its kind in the Adirondack Park.

One of the most productive periods in the Association's history began under the Presidency of Arthur M. Crocker who served in that capacity from 1964 until 1982. Influenced deeply by his outdoor experiences in the High Peaks and the Tahawus Club in Newcomb and by the early conservation writers, Crocker led the Association in its study of the recommendations of the Temporary Study Commission



The Schaefer home, future site of the Association's Center for the Forest Preserve, Niskayuna, New York. Drawing by Dave Kipphuth.

on the Future of the Adirondacks, leading to advocacy for the creation of a regional plan under the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Private Land Use and Development Plan, and the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. Crocker also deeply believed that Adirondack towns and villages and local and seasonal residents held the prescription for the health of the Park through wise leadership, local land use planning, sound forestry practices, and tax assistance and abatement. Beginning in 1970, Crocker regularly brought local and state government officials, forestry and environmental representatives together to confer on issues of common concern. Crocker is fond of reminding his readers that the root word for both ecology and economics is the Greek word "Oikos," meaning home.

Crocker's conferences included one at Newcomb Central School where an unusual coalition met to oppose the large dams on the Upper Hudson River then under study by the New York State Water Resources

Commission, the City of New York and the Federal Army Corps of Engineers. Kettle Mountain and Gooley Dams would have flooded 35 miles of this wild river and its tributaries and 14,000 acres of productive private forestland and Forest Preserve all the way to the current Visitor Interpretive Center at Newcomb and neighboring Catlin Lake in the Huntington Wildlife Forest. The power of this coalition's opposition to these dams led to state legislation in 1969 that bans all dams on the Upper Hudson and its tributaries above Luzerne. By 1979, Crocker and the Association were writing about the growing evidence of damage to the Park's aquatic ecosystems from acid rain caused by sulfur and nitrogen precursors largely emitted by dirty coal-burning power plants to the west. By then, the Association had helped to create the Adirondack Council, and by 1984, a coalition of environmental organizations had helped convince Governor Mario Cuomo and the State Legislature of the need for the nation's first acid rain law restricting

in-state emissions of sulfur dioxide.

Also, by 1979 the Association's decade-long support for the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) contributed to our loss of newly-elected Association President Arthur V. Savage, Elizabethtown and New York City attorney, Adirondack historian and activist. Savage had no sooner taken the reins of the Association's Board when Governor Hugh Carey nominated him for a seat on the APA. Later confirmed by the State Senate, Savage had to resign from the Association, but remained a member of the APA Board of Commissioners from 1979 until 1996, a truly remarkable tenure and record of service to the people of the State.

In 1982 the Association invited recently retired Chairman of the State Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, Bernard C. Smith, to become its President. Bernie Smith was born in the coal mining country of Pennsylvania, not known as a hotbed of environmentalism. His home district was Northport, Long Island. However, it was his love for the outdoors that led him to the inevitable conclusion that the chaos of the marketplace was leaving future generations a heavily polluted legacy. He shepherded the State's landmark environmental legislation, including the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act and the State Environmental Quality Review Act through the Senate, working closely with Governors Rockefeller, Wilson and Carey and the Assembly leadership. He helped the Association to appre-

ciate the art of effective lobbying in Albany in the modern era and the necessity of coalition building to achieve good legislation. At the close of his Presidency in 1987, an Executive Director was hired, the first paid Association staff since Edward Hall retired in 1929.

Smith, Crocker, Schaefer and Vice Presidents William P. Dunham and James C. Dawson presided over the Association's support and nurturing of the Adirondack Research Center at Union College, Schenectady. By 1985, the Center's library was building an enviable collection of rare archives as well as books, maps and photographs and had co-sponsored, with the Adirondack Mountain Club, a conference about the status of the Forest Preserve on the occasion of the Forest Preserve Centennial Anniversary. The increasingly educational role of the Association included sponsorship of two highly influential Adirondack documentaries, *Of Rivers and Men* and *The Adirondack – The Land Nobody Knows* (Couchsachraga Association). The former film was credited with convincing Governor Carey to greatly expand the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers system in the mid-1970s. The latter film won a Cine Eagle Award for Non-Theatrical Events Abroad in 1981.

In 1988, Association President James C. Dawson presided over the formal merger of the Association and what is now called the Adirondack Research Library. As a veteran of Adirondack policy debate, Jim helped professionalize both the staff and the board while he encouraged the organization to issue annual

publications and to convene annual conferences. These assist the public to gain inspiration and awareness of the history and management challenges in the Park and encourage collaboration and problem-solving among diverse park professionals and stakeholders.

During the 1990s, Association Presidents included Dave Newhouse who, like Jim Dawson, had also chaired the Adirondack Mountain Club. Dave worked with both organizations three decades earlier to investigate and document unconstitutional cross country snowmobile and jeep traffic deep within the Forest Preserve. His investigations contributed to substantial policy shifts within the Conservation Department of the early and mid 1960s, the closure of many roads in places that would later be classified Wilderness and the restriction of snowmobiles in Wild Forest areas to designated trails only. Newhouse is notable in several other respects. He helped compile Association conservation policies with respect to Wilderness and other lands in the Park that are useful for introducing resolutions for staff and board action. He also brought the organization into the computer age (McIntosh systems!) and for over 15 years has donated equipment and volunteered his time in their applications and upgrades.

From 1993-95, President Herb Hudnut of Glens Falls helped the Association to establish clearer goals and plans for its future. These internal planning documents helped to secure new funds to pay for new staff, facilities and

programs. Succeeding Herb, Peter Roemer brought contacts in the field of wildlife and habitat conservation. Peter's low key style, combined with his firm adherence to the principles of the Association proved to be of great importance in furthering good relations among conservation allies and in gaining new support. Tom Cobb also brought new contacts to the Association during his term and an international vision. Tom's experience and interest in international parks and protected area conservation, combined with Trustee Paul Bray's inspired leadership, led to international park exchanges between the Adirondack Park and Italy's Abruzzo National Park. Later, Trustee Dan Plumley also began exchanges between the Adirondack Park and environmental and cultural professionals from Buryatia and Tuva, Russia and with Mongolian officials and reindeer herding peoples. These exchanges considerably broaden what otherwise can appear as a parochial set of conservation issues and problems for the Adirondacks and promote international understanding, contacts, technical assistance sharing and common ground across the waters and mountains of the world.

In 1997, President Cobb initiated and current President Abbie Verner, the Association's first female President, has extended the organization's commitment to a \$1.2 million capital campaign that includes our first permanent headquarters and a modern 4,000 square foot Adirondack Research Library and conservation learning center in Niskayuna. When completed in 2003, this Center for

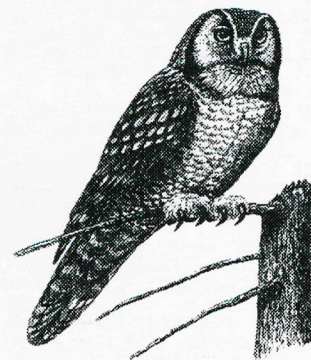
the Forest Preserve at the home of the late Paul Schaefer will create a meeting place for policy dialogue and conserve a vitally important set of rare Adirondack archives for public use. It will also expand the Association's capacity to influence today's and tomorrow's conservation leaders and promote a wilderness public lands and conservation ethic with a special understanding of our common responsibilities for the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. In 2001, the Association began a program it calls Advocates for Wilderness Stewardship that seeks to raise the standards of excellence for management of the Forest Preserve through unit management planning and promote collaborative, interactive training and mentoring in wilderness appreciation and stewardship.

While the Association at 100 years may no longer be called upon to stop a huge hydroelectric dam in a lovely wilderness valley, today's challenges are no less daunting or important. Key management challenges for the Park include the thorough orientation and training of Forest Preserve administrators, managers and planners in the principles, tools and techniques of contemporary wilderness management; the creation and funding of new Park interpreters and rangers dedicated to the Forest Preserve mission; the identification and assessment of biological systems and ecological trends across the Park's landscape and the application of that knowledge to Park management; management of our own recreational impulses; and, the anticipation by leaders throughout the Adirondacks and the nation of how to respond to

the world's changing climate, among many other topics.

We must also collaboratively work together to truly promote and apply Dr. Edwin H. Ketchledge's idea of an educational Forest Preserve, where the highest summits are surmounted not only with our feet but with our understanding and aware minds and hearts, a spiritual journey. We must grow as an organization, gain new members, recruit younger and more diverse supporters, retain and re-engage elders as mentors. The Association's headquarters and library will be a vital tool in this recruitment of new, and the retention of older, wilderness stewards.

For by preserving the home of Paul Schaefer as a living memorial to wilderness pioneers everywhere, the organization can utilize it to inspire and make passionate, individuals striving to protect and to live in harmony with the land. It is the youth of today and tomorrow who hold in their hands the future of organizations like the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the wilderness lands and environments that continue to be closely watched by the nation and by peoples around the globe.



Hawk Owl. Drawing by Mike Storey.